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ABSTRACT

A growing number of speech communication graduates are unable to find employment in their field. To ameliorate this situation, speech communication educators should consider the following three recommendations. First, the mission of higher education should be reassessed. In addition to the creation and dissemination of knowledge, higher education needs to place more emphasis on the application of such knowledge. For example, in place of laboratory research, more field research should be encouraged. A second recommendation involves remodeling the curriculum. Communication colleges need to prepare students to do something other than teach what they have been taught. These students must be educated so that they have more to offer nonacademic organizations. The third recommendation is that speech communication educators redefine their professional roles. One step in this direction would be for the Speech Communication Association to add a division of organizational communication to make its research and consulting services available to business and industry. Another step is for educators to begin to change from teacher/scholar to teacher/scholar/consultants. Finally, educators could begin to act as a liaison between the classroom and the business world. More efforts along these lines can provide a way for improving students' abilities to apply their knowledge to a job situation. (FL)

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THE MISFIT BETWEEN THE SPEECH COMMUNICATION FIELD AND THE NEEDS OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

by

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A paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Houston, Texas, December, 1975.

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Problem

When I was a graduate student looking for my first job, I heard the philosophy of job hunting expressed in the catchy statement, "One for the money; two for the show; three to get ready; and four to go." The idea was that a speech communication scholar with a newly earned PhD could pick and choose among job offers to optimize the financial factor, the prestige principle, or the discretionary decision. If the motto were to be rewritten in light of today's job market it might be "Remember the Alamo" or fight like hell to survive and worry about the goodies like prestige and promotions tomorrow.

According to one source[1] 107,000 teacher-graduates could not find jobs in the graduating classes of 1974. This includes both graduate and undergraduate degree holders. The Chronicle of Higher Education (Jan. 20, 1975) quoted the convention of the Association of American Colleges as labeling the 1975 job outlook as probably the worst since World War II. As a result, more and more college graduates in the social sciences and humanities are accepting jobs unrelated to their field. In the same article, Terry H. Bell, U.S. Commissioner of Education summarized the problem by stating that "the college [or university] that devotes itself totally and unequivocally to liberal arts today is just kidding itself. . . . Today we in education must recognize that it is our duty to provide our students also with salable skills."[2]

To make it worse, we can't reduce the dissonance by feeling that the problem is confined to just undergraduate schools and/or the "rhetorical" arm of the speech communication field. The behavioral scientists among us are in trouble too. The National Science Foundation

projects that we will have a surplus of PhD's of between 80,000 and 105,000 in the fields of science and engineering by 1985. They conclude that increasing numbers of PhD degree holders will face unemployment, while one-fifth of the graduates will have to settle for jobs unrelated to activities in science or engineering (compared to one-tenth in 1972). Furthermore, a significant shift will be felt by the remaining job seekers away from other academic jobs into "nontraditional job opportunities."[3] By 1985 a full one-third of the work force at the doctoral level in science and engineering may be employed by neither academic institutions or government. A recent ICA publication summarized a study by the Council for Policy Study in Higher Education. It projects unemployment for 1 out of every 8 PhD degree holders by 1985 as a result of the current trend toward retrenchment.[4]

Finally, a commentary on the current academic year indicates that

> Many people in higher education believe the answer to their problem lies in making major changes in the way colleges [and universities] are run and in the product they deliver. Higher educator's problems have been likened to those of the auto industry. As one observer put it: . . .'Like Detroit, they are going to have to cut prices on the old educational models and retool the line to produce something cheaper and more efficient.'[5]

Recommendations

Now that the problem has been established, what can be done about it? Although there are probably an infinite number of specific suggestions and recommendations which might help ameliorate the situation, three broad solutions seem plausible.

Reassess Our Mission. The mission in higher education, especially at the graduate level has been primarily to create and disseminate

knowledge. While these are indeed worthy goals, they may need to move over and allow other goals to share top-priority positions. Thomas Martin, President of Illinois Institute of Technology recently outlined the five operations of the knowledge industry as the following. (1) Storage, for future generations to share what we know; (2) Transmission, teaching what we know; (3) Discovery, creating new knowledge through research; (4) Scholarship, organizing what is already known; and (5) Application, taking what is known and applying it to real-world problems.[6] Martin contends that the fifth operation (application) has traditionally taken a distant back seat to the other four. In my judgment, the problems cited in the first section of this paper are, in part, a result of ignoring application as a function of higher education.

If we are to help remedy the current situation, we must operationalize some fundamental changes in colleges and universities.

It has long been axiomatic that to be a good teacher one must talk and listen; but to be a successful teacher one must read and especially write. As long as the university reward system remains this way, top-notch scholars will continue to write to the exclusion of other activities which may be quite time-consuming but also valuable. For example, attempting to conduct field research in industrial plants is generally more time-consuming than conducting research with easily-available college sophomores. In addition, my experience has been that the SCA sponsored journals are pretty much disinterested in publishing applied research. And if you think that applied research is inherently less prestigious or rigorous than laboratory research simply consult the Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, The American Psychologist,

Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, Personnel Journal, or the Academy of Management Journal to see the fallacy in that kind of thinking. We are not only elitists when it comes to accepting articles for journals, but we may very well become extinct through such elitist practices. Let me hasten to add that I strongly support laboratory research, but we have put all our intellectual eggs in one basket for too long. It is time for a change!

Remodel Our Curriculum. We need to learn a lesson from colleges of business administration and begin to educate our students (graduate and undergraduate alike) to do something other than teach others what they have been taught. Jim Gibson wrote an editorial for the Central States Speech Journal in which he advocated some changes to reduce the job market glut for our graduates.[7] He recommended counseling incoming graduate students regarding the poor potential job prospects. This would probably lead to fewer students in our programs which would eventually have deleterious effects on our departmental budgets. Wouldn't a still better alternative be to help educate our students so that they have more to offer non-academic organizations which would eventually result in an improved job marketplace? I think we need to ask ourselves what business schools are doing that we aren't, since their students are more in demand today than ever before. Primarily, they are adapting to the needs of their client better.

You might believe that our content is inherently less adaptable to the needs of business and industry and therefore we will never compete in that job market. The data do not support that opinion. Several recent surveys indicate that speech communication competencies rate

very high as key elements of any supervisor's job.[8] We are undoubtedly the best qualified to provide education in building communication competencies. Specific suggestions as to how to go about accomplishing this goal have already been advanced.[9] The task should be ours, not someone else's!

Redefine Our Professional Roles. In order to better meet the current needs, the Speech Communication Association could better serve its members by adding a 10th division of organizational communication. This organization lags far behind ICA in this respect. ICA's Division IV has sponsored the research and development of the Communication Audit. This is one giant step toward making our research and consulting services valuable to business and industry. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan has proved that this type of applied research endeavor is indeed respectable academic business.

Activities such as these would help to improve our discipline's image. One study found that most businessmen felt the need for employees to possess a high degree of communication competency, but did not perceive departments of speech or communication as sources which provided these kinds of qualified job applicants.[10]

Another way we can redefine our professional role is to begin to change from teacher/scholars to teacher/scholar/consultants. This is more in line with the professional role as defined by some business school administrators.[11] This closely parallels a three-dimensional model for faculty development I proposed in 1972.[12]

Finally, we can redefine our professional role to act as a liaison between the classroom and the world of business and industry. This is

already being done on a small scale through the use of cooperative work/study programs with businesses.[13] More efforts along these lines can provide a substantial vehicle for improving our students' abilities to apply their knowledge to a job situation.

Summary

In this paper, a critical problem for our discipline has been documented. Three broad recommendations have been offered. Namely, (1) Reassess Our Mission; (2) Remodel Our Curriculum, and (3) Redefine Our Professional Roles. If we follow these recommendations perhaps in 1985 we will still be able to look our graduates in the eye and be proud of what we have done for them instead of to them.

Footnotes

1. "Manifold Effects of Hard Times," Time, December 9, 1974, p. 40-43.

2. "What Kind of Education, What Kind of Jobs?," The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 20, 1975.

3. "Ph.D. Surplus, 1985," The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 28, 1975.

4. "Long Range Planning Committee Reports," ICA News, Summer, 1975, p. 3.

5. "A Lean Year Begins: Layoffs, Closings, Deep Cuts in Courses," U.S. News and World Report, September 1, 1975, p. 45.

6. Thomas Martin, Jr. "The Five Operations of the Knowledge Industry," commencement address at General Motors Institute, August, 1975, Flint, Michigan.

7. James W. Gibson, "The Academic Marketplace: Another Case of Overkill?," Central States Speech Journal, Summer, 1973, 24, Editorial.

8. Samuel S. Dubin, Everett Alderman, and H. Leroy Marlow, "Managerial and Supervisory Educational Needs of Business and Industry in Pennsylvania," unpublished technical report, Continuing Education Business Office, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania; Guveng G. Alpander, "Planning Management Training Programs for Organizational Development," Personnel Journal (January 1974), 15-25; "College Diplomas Rated Low as Job Qualification in Survey," The Flint Journal, March 15, 1973; Paul Mushinsky, "Performance Ratings of Engineers: Do Graduates Fit the Bill?," Engineering Education (November 1974), 187-188; D. P. Hoyt and P. M. Mushinsky, "Occupational Success and College Experiences of Engineering Graduates," Engineering Education (May 1973), 622-623; H. C. Edgeworth, "Curriculum Feedback: Beta Gamma Sigma Opinion Survey of the Curriculum," Collegiate News and Views (May 1971), 13-15.

9. L. David Schuelke, "Integrating Career Competencies Into the Communication Curriculum," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Central States Speech Association, Kansas City, April, 1975; Stewart L. Tubbs, "Building a Career-Oriented Communication Curriculum," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Central States Speech Association, Kansas City, April, 1975; Stewart L. Tubbs, "The Organizational Consulting Spectrum," a paper presented at the semi-annual convention of the Michigan Speech Association, Kalamazoo, April, 1975; Stewart L. Tubbs and John W. Baird, "Communicating in the Organization" in The Open Person: Self-Disclosure and Personal Growth (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1976).

10. Diane Lee Lockwood and Sara Boatman, "Marketability: Who Needs Us and What Can We Do for Them?," a paper presented at the annual convention of the Central States Speech Association, Kansas City, April, 1975.

11. Ronald L. Smith, "Preliminary Statement on Faculty Responsibilities," a position paper presented to the faculty of the College of Business Administration, University of Nebraska, September 24, 1974.

12. Stewart L. Tubbs, "New Directions in Communication: Getting It Together," in Stewart L. Tubbs, New Directions in Communication (Flint: International Communication Association, 1972), p. 1-7.

13. Cal Downs et.al., "Work Experience Programs in Career-Oriented Speech Communication Departments," a panel presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, December, 1974.